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February 27, 1996

Mr. William F. Caton  
Acting Secretary  
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1919 M Street, N. W., Room 222  
Washington, D. C. 20554

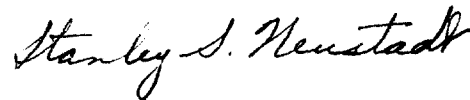
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Re: MM Docket No. 95-176

Dear Mr. Caton

Transmitted herewith, on behalf of Ohio Educational Telecommunications, are an original and four copies of its Comments in response to the Notice of Inquiry in the above-referenced proceeding.

Very truly yours



Stanley S. Neustadt

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BEFORE THE

# Federal Communications Commission

In the Matter of )

Closed Captioning and Video Description )  
of Video Programming )

MM Docket No. 95-176

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## COMMENTS OF OHIO EDUCATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Ohio Educational Telecommunications ("OET") (formerly Ohio Educational Broadcasting Network Commission), by its attorneys, hereby responds to the Notice of Inquiry released by the Commission in the above-captioned matter on December 4, 1995. OET supports the fullest development of both closed captioning and video description, consistent with the maintenance of other broadcast or cable services which are designed to make their benefits available to those with disabilities. These Comments will deal primarily with video description because OET is required by Ohio law to be concerned with those who are blind or visually impaired; nine radio reading services in Ohio are under its jurisdiction. It should be understood, however, that these Comments contain the views of OET and do not necessarily represent the views of any one of those nine Ohio radio reading services. In support of its position, OET states:

1. OET, which has participated in many FCC rule making proceedings which have involved or affected public broadcasting directly or indirectly, is an independent agency of the Government of Ohio, created by Act of the General Assembly of the State of Ohio. It was created

to foster the growth and development of public broadcasting in Ohio, and to provide all Ohio citizens with access to the services provided by public stations. To this end, the OET network links Ohio's 12 educational television stations, 29 educational radio stations, and nine radio reading services in a statewide system and provides grants to those stations to subsidize operations and programming. It was in 1983 that OET's budget first included funding for Ohio Radio Reading Services (ORRS) and subsequently established an ORRS state coordinator's position at OET. The nine Ohio radio reading services, of course, provide spoken information to those who do not have easy access to normal print due to visual loss or physical disability.

2. The public interest benefits of video description can hardly be measured in quantitative objective terms. It has become a policy of our national government, most recently manifest by the provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which deal expressly with closed captioning and video description, to make available to those who are disabled as many as possible of those things available to the non-disabled in the workplace and in virtually all other aspects of daily living. Used with forethought, modern technologies have made possible in many areas the participation of the disabled in the same manner as those with no disabilities. The ultimate question is no longer, as it may once have been, what is needed to enable the disabled to function at all in our society, but, rather, to what extent can we provide equal participation in the benefits of our society to the disabled.

3. At present, television is a primary source of information, as well as entertainment, for our population. Those who are visually impaired, of necessity, miss much of what television provides, and its informational component is necessary for independent living. Even more significant, however, is the self-esteem which results when a blind or visually impaired

person is enabled to participate as an equal in discussions of such information and entertainment with sighted persons, from whom they would otherwise be essentially isolated because of their disability. There are, of course, degrees of visual impairment, and it is virtually impossible to define with specificity the degree of impairment which either requires or may be greatly benefitted by video description. The limited use of audio descriptions for live theater has shown that many visually impaired patrons (legally blind and partially sighted) who attended without the audio descriptions and believed them to be unnecessary, realized for the first time when audio descriptions were available how much they had been missing. It is highly probable that the number of visually impaired persons will increase, both absolutely and proportionally, in coming years. Many conditions which affect sight adversely are associated with old age, and it appears that longevity is increasing in the United States.

4. In terms of ultimate objectives, it is not necessary for the Commission to know precisely how many visually impaired persons there are in our society. There can be no doubt that there are a sufficient number to justify every reasonable effort to make available to them those benefits which are available to the sighted. The importance of the size of the visually impaired group can have significance, if at all, only in determining whether the cost of any specific measure is justified. OET does not have information concerning the present or anticipated costs of video description. However, there are some considerations which bear upon that matter which should be taken into account.

5. As a practical matter, video description must be the responsibility of the producer or the entity responsible for the production of a program. Only in this way can there be any uniformity in a program broadcast by many stations throughout the country or a region. Of course,

in the case of a program produced by an individual station for its own use any video description must be produced by that station. It is equally apparent that the importance of video description will vary among various types of programs. At one extreme might be a political address from a studio without visual aids, or a studio interview of a celebrity, and at the other, a play or movie, in which the dialogue does not describe the action or locale. At various intermediate levels might be sporting events, in which the television broadcast normally includes verbal description and commentary, but not as much as a radio description, although neither can really convey the action itself to a visually impaired audience. If possible, even programs of this latter sort should not be ignored for video description, especially because many of the sighted audience might also prefer more detailed verbal descriptions and explanations.

6. It is to be hoped that with increasing use of video description the costs of the process and the necessary equipment, both for production and reception, will decrease. To the extent, however, that existing facilities, such as the SAP channels are utilized, extreme care should be taken to avoid eliminating or decreasing other uses of the spectrum or facilities upon which disabled persons have come to rely heavily, such as the radio reading services, some of which utilize the SAP channels. Each service has its own very important function in helping the disabled to lead lives as normal as possible. Neither closed captioning, nor video description, nor radio reading services is more important than the other--each serves a different and very important function.

7. OET regrets that it is unable to supply much of the factual data requested by the Commission in the NOI. It hopes that other regional or national organizations may do so. OET's basic purpose in filing these Comments is to express to the Commission its fullest support for the adoption of all reasonable measures in the areas of the Commission's competence to eliminate the

effects of visual and hearing disabilities, including video description and closed captioning. In any cost-benefit analysis, the benefit of these measures must not be underestimated.

Respectfully submitted  
OHIO EDUCATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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